

## Whatever Floats Your Boat by L. Borealis

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Humor, Romance

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Eleven/Jane H., Mike W.

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2018-12-25 18:17:52

**Updated:** 2018-12-25 18:17:52

**Packaged:** 2019-12-12 23:19:47

**Rating:** K

**Chapters:** 1

**Words:** 2,350

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** Sometimes words are too big to handle, even for Mike Wheeler, the boy who has a million. A summery lakeside Mileven bit-o-fluff.

## Whatever Floats Your Boat

The chattering of Mike's friends filled the air around him. Their voices mixed with the sounds of lapping water and the birdsong that echoed from above. It all blended together in an oddly calming way, lulling Mike's mind into a state of rare and blissful quiet. Mike allowed his eyes to slip shut. He leaned his head back, took a deep breath, and stretched out his bare legs. The warm sunlight bathed his face with a hint of relief and a whisper of hope.

It was finally here. The first sensations of summer.

The tiny beach-like outcropping at the far end of Lover's Lake was the perfect place for such a day. Mrs. Byers said that the location had once been a popular spot for teens back in the 60s. Over the years, though, the makeshift trail had become overgrown, and thus it had been lost to the current generation of Hawkins High students. What remained was an almost impossible to detect inlet with a just-big-enough patch of sand, hidden from the rest of the lake by a crop of huge weeping willows. Lily pads and reeds crept from the water, creating an idyllic setting almost too perfect for the boring confines of Hawkins, Indiana.

The whole outing had been orchestrated by Mrs. Byers. Mike had heard her whispering persuasions to Hopper all throughout the spring. It had taken her weeks to convince Hopper to loosen the reins enough for just this single outing. And truly? It couldn't have come soon enough.

El had become increasingly lonely as the months had progressed. As the air had warmed and the world around them had awoken into spring, the rules of her seclusion had begun to break her spirit. It broke Mike's heart more than he cared to admit. For, there was only so much that a fourteen-year-old boy could do. Of course, he called her every single night. He smuggled her sweets and books and little hair accessories that he'd swiped from Nancy. He made sure to shoot Hopper snide looks whenever he drummed up the courage. More than anything, though, Mike worked as hard as he could to remind her (and himself) that this was all going to pass with time.

Mrs. Byers, though? She had been able to do more. And she had.

Mike made a mental note to thank her later, because on this day, surrounded by her friends and dappled in sunlight, El looked happy. Maybe that was why his brain was so blissfully quiet. Maybe it was the way the sun fell onto her, showcasing the golden flecks in her honey eyes in a way he had never seen before. Or, maybe it was the way her fingers lazily threaded through his in the sand, pumping his hand whenever she laughed at something that Max or Lucas said. Maybe it was her own words, spinning faster than Mike had ever heard her speak before, complete with a hint of confidence that was so incredibly hard earned.

Mike bit his teeth into his growing smile.

God, he was so proud of her.

He wished he could have recorded their very first talks, if only to play them back for her now. Sure, Mike still yammered for about 80% of their nightly talks, but increasingly, El had begun to add her own thoughts to the mix. Questions and answers, with opinions and jokes and ideas tossed in-between. El's unique sense of humor had materialized slowly throughout it all. She had a surprisingly dry and deadpan humor, one that always seemed to catch Mike off guard in the most delightful way. She had also shown herself to be highly opinionated, a trait only made more apparent as her vocabulary and confidence had grown. More than anything though, El was ceaselessly curious about the world. It was a trait they shared, and it made Mike's heart skip with hope for the potential of what could be.

Mike felt like he was unlocking El's personality piece by glorious piece, and he couldn't deny the effect it had on him. The tumbling feel that made him slip deeper and deeper into... a word even he didn't know how to say.

But that was a thought for another time...

Mike opened his eyes and shifted his gaze toward El once again. Her wavy hair was frizzy from the humidity. She had tied it half-up with a pink band that he had swiped for her from Nancy's room. She

brushed some stray strands roughly from her face as she listened to Dustin drone on about a family of ducks on the other side of the shore.

After a moment, Dustin stood up and wiped his hands on his pants. He held his hand out to El.

"I'm going to go take a look at them," Dustin said. "Wanna come?"

"Um..." El stuttered, looking back at Mike for the first time in a few minutes. "I'll stay here. Is that... okay?"

Dustin shrugged, "Whatever floats your boat."

"Wh -"

Dustin waved his hand casually as he began to walk away, "Really, it's okay!"

Mike watched El curiously as El watched Dustin leave. That was when he saw it. The now familiar pattern. It played out like clockwork through her expressions. First, the sharp line appeared between her eyebrows. Then, she blinked three times in quick succession. Finally, her lips moved with no sound; the hints of fragmented words driving upon them.

Mike leaned close, "What is it?"

El twitched in surprise. She bit her lip and watched Dustin's retreating figure for another couple of seconds. She then turned slowly toward Mike. Her eyes were serious. Her voice, a low and worried whisper.

"M-mike," she stuttered. "I... I didn't bring a boat."

"...What?"

"He said I should... float my boat but..." her eyes snapped wide. "Was I supposed to bring a boat? I- I don't have a boat!"

"Oh!"

Mike worked fast to successfully bite back the laugh that shot to his lips so as to not embarrass her. "No, El. You don't need a boat. He um... That's just a phrase. Dustin said an idiom."

El stared at him blankly. "He's an idiot?"

Mike snorted, "Oh, he's definitely an idiot. But no. He said an idiom. It's like... a saying. They're phrases that don't really mean what the actual words mean. Like 'whatever floats your boat' means 'do whatever you want.'

El's eyes twinkled with instant annoyance. "He told me to float a boat. But... I'm not supposed to float a boat."

"Nope. You're just supposed to 'do what you want'."

"That is..." Her shoulders quickly dropped and she huffed. "That is stupid! He could say 'yes'. No more. Just 'yes'. But he told me to 'float a boat'?! That's... that's stupid! Words are so stupid, Mike."

It finally slipped. Mike could no longer contain his laughter. "You just said a whole lot of words about how dumb words are."

El's tense look softened in an instant. She ducked her head as the slightest pink rose into her cheeks. "I'm getting better, yeah?"

"Yeah!" Mike replied. He playfully bumped her shoulder. "Way better! That was almost a whole rant!"

El chuckled. Her dimples caught the sunlight as she looked at him with her perfect closed-lipped smile.

"Don't feel bad that you don't know these phrases, though," Mike added as he reached out for her hand. "You're right. They are stupid. It's just something you learn."

"It's just something you learn." El repeated back to him with a mocking tone.

"Hey!"

El giggled and shifted closer to Mike. "Tell me some other idioms."

"Idioms."

"Right. Idioms."

"Well..." Mike played with her fingers for a silent moment as he thought. "There's 'hold your horses'. That means to 'slow down' or 'don't get carried away'."

"Get carried away?"

Mike grimaced. "Shit, that's another idiom, isn't it? Yeah, I guess they both mean to slow down."

El rolled her eyes, "People could just say, 'slow down'."

"Oh! There's 'kick the bucket'! That means to die."

"WHAT?!" El yelped, her eyes blowing wide.

"Yeah... that one is really weird now that I think about it."

El burst into laughter. Free flowing, loud, unrestrained laughter. She latched onto his hand as she tried and failed to catch her breath. "That is... that is SO stupid!"

"It is..." Mike replied, giggles beginning to fill the space between his own words in a contagious manner. "That one is really stupid!"

El's laughter was joyous. Over the course of the next few seconds it took over her entire body. Her nose was scrunched and pink lips were turned upward. Her eyes were screwed tightly shut. Her fingers gripped tightly on his as she leaned over on herself and tried to catch her breath. She seemed so happy, so incredibly beautiful and perfectly at peace...

Mike's own laughter subsided. For, in that moment, an emotion so much stronger than amusement flooded through his body like an earthquake.

"Ooh, are you teaching El phrases?"

Mike jumped at the intruding voice. He looked up to find Max

standing over them, a chip bag that had been by El's feet now in her hands.

El finally caught her breath and looked up toward their friend. "Idioms?" she said tentatively, trying the word on for size.

"I see..."

Max took a quick look at Mike. Her expression turned to one of devilish glee. Max bent down to eye-level and leaned in toward El. "I've got one for you, Ellie," Max said, her eyes flicking back on Mike before she said, "Head over heels."

"What's that?"

"I bet Wheeler would love to explain that one to you," she replied with a smirk. "Since he is. Completely. It's written all over his face right now. Have fun, Mike!"

Max patted Mike patronizingly on the knee and bounded instantly away.

"What does that mean?" El asked.

"Uh..."

"What?" El asked, her laughter gone, her gaze intent.

Mike made a mental note to kill Max later. For, El was staring at him with that look. That piercing gaze that Mike knew meant that El was expecting a full explanation. His tongue felt instantly dry.

"It's... It's when you really like someone," he stuttered, "Like... really like them? You like them so much you can't stop thinking about them and you could do like, flips? and stuff?"

"Flips?"

Mike's hand flamed so hot within El's grasp that he was sure it was going to burn her.

"Well, no. Not actually flips. But you feel like you could do flips when

you look at them? Does that... does that make sense?"

"No."

Mike bit back a groan. "I guess... I'm uh... Okay..." he took a deep breath and tried to steady himself, "It's when your stomach feels all squirmy and your skin feels too tight and you can't stop thinking about them no matter how hard you try. Did I already say that part? Yeah, I did... I think... Uh..."

Mike's words died in an agonizing swallow.

El bit her lip. Yet, after a short moment, something seemed to dawn in her eyes. She broke into a timid smile.

"Like... like love?" she asked.

"Uh..."

"Yes?" She asked with firm nod.

"uh...yes." Mike confirmed, his breath short. "L-love. Yes."

El's hand then tightened on his. She smiled and ducked her eyes away.

"I'm..." El's stuttered. "I'm head over heels."

"You ARE?" Mike blurted so loudly the birds above them took flight.

El gazed up toward him slowly. The golden flecks in her eyes shined through her lashes. She nodded.

It was the last thing that Mike saw before he kissed her.

It was the only thing that Mike could think to do! Because words? Words were failing him here. Big time. The words were so real and so right and far too big for his young mouth to handle. How could he ever find the words to explain how he felt? How could he explain the fluttering in his chest or the sweat on his palms? How could he explain the constant barrage of goosebumps that ran up his neck when she touched his arm and said his name? Or the involuntary



somersaults his stomach performed when she joked and laughed? How could he ever even begin to explain how his heart had expanded so much that it threatened to topple him over and throw him -

"- Head over heels," Mike gasped like a breath of fresh air against her lips. "Me too. Absolutely."

He braved to open his eyes then, shocked by his own outburst. Yet he needn't have been worried. For, the surge of warmth in El's eyes told him everything he needed to know.

El was quiet for a moment. She just looked at him. Her eyes wide, deep, floating. Her smile soft.

"Can I kiss you again?" Mike whispered.

She shrugged and said, with the lightest lilt, "Whatever floats your boat."

The laugh that cut through Mike's body was a sudden and glorious surprise.

"Did I use it right?" she asked excitedly, her eyes lighting up at his response.

"Yeah. Perfect!" Mike replied joyously, "Just... just.. per-"

His final word became lost between his smile, her giggle, and their firmly pressed lips.

Mike did not care about the fact that Hopper's eyes were definitely on them. He did not care that his friends were probably laughing under their breath just a few feet away. He did not care about the birdsong, or the lapping waves, or the summer sun. He only cared about the girl who's air he was sharing in that very moment.

Because Mike? Mike was truly... undeniably... irreversibly... head over heels for her.